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ABSTRACT

Since the collapse of state socialism in East Germany in 1989, political discourse among citizens has changed dramatically. There is now talk of democracy, tolerance, the individual, and democratic socialism. This paper examines the impact of this new discourse upon citizenship education in what was formerly East Germany specifically focusing on changes made in civics textbooks. Old textbooks were filled with attempts to instill rigid stereotypes in children's minds, for example, "Lessons should contribute to intensifying a disgust for and hatred of imperialism among pupils." A new civics is slowly emerging, and some crucial questions need to be addressed: does the change in ideology and language also correspond to a change in consciousness and attitude or is the change in language just a means of covering up the old mentality and perhaps even the old ideology? German reunification raises some important issues including whether former citizens and experts of East Germany will be allowed to develop their own textbooks. (DB)

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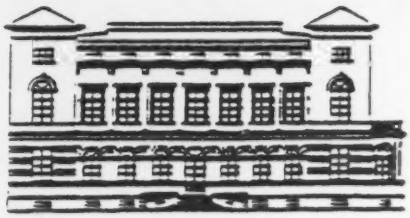

GEORG-ECKERT-INSTITUT
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INTERNATIONALE SCHULBUCHFORSCHUNG

IN SEARCH OF A NEW LANGUAGE: TEXTBOOKS IN THE GDR

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1. The end of public inarticulation

The collapse of the German type of state socialism also resulted in the breakdown and release from the state's monopoly on all forms of communications and from the manipulative effects of the language of Marxist-Leninism. The new way of thinking in the GDR is finding expression in a new language. The slogan "Wir sind das Volk" (We are the people), has become the statement of the year. Both the optimists among GDR officials and the pessimists among western observers were equally mistaken; the so-called power of language, using methods of "Spachlenkung" manipulation, (Dieckmann:1975), was not enough to nurture the growth of socialistic conciousness in M-L terms. Although the "German October revolution", as far as its timing and the course of events was concerned, came as a surprise to the whole of the Social Sciences (and everyone else), the fact that a large rift had already existed between the government and those governed was well-known even before the "Wandel" (change). The revolution in mentality of the East German people in M-L terms failed to take place. (Rytlewski:1989), and the people were tired of being inundated with propaganda (Piecaper:1976). They preferred to retreat into the private sphere and the recesses of society. A well-known fact for a long time has been the emergence of two political cultures (one with an attitude of political indifference, the other in favour of informal alternative politics). They were partially preserved from the past and partially formed just recently within and against the official political culture (Lit. Rytlewski:1989). Up until the revolution,

there was no clear indication as to the extent to which the alternative political culture had developed and the degree to which it would be possible to awaken a political conciousness among the so-called non-political people. However, most East German citizens had become adept, even before the revolution, at using a repertoire of language stemming from at least two levels of politics - this involved "code-switching" permanently (Schlosser:1989).

The German autumn revolution saw the successful struggle to free the language and set the seal on the fact that 40 years of public inarticulation had come to an end. In autumn we witnessed a burst of openness and the official language is now being substituted by the language of the people (Schlosser:1989). A new and dominant word field (Klein:1989) is being developed; democracy, dialogue, tolerance, individual and not to say the least democratic socialism are included in it.

What has been significant and impressive is the way in which people, speaking in public, are finding it an effort to express themselves, thus clearly demonstrating that they are searching for their own language.

2. In search of a new language

I can see five reasons for this kind of searching and uncertain language behaviour:

1. Beyond the search for words lies the search for a new identity. Having rejected state socialism, there is at present no clear indication as to how things will be in the future. The once unifying effect of hostile stereotype images of the "FRG" and the opponents of state socialism as specified by the state have now been dispensed with. The people have become increasingly aware of the plurality of life-styles possible and the challenge of having a choice, as well as the tasks required in obtaining it.

2. "Permanent schizophrenia" and "double-dealing" in the old system (Wolf:1990) has meant that a number of people have not learnt how to articulate what they want.

3. A mentality of subjugation developed under the influence of two dictatorships which, even after the upheaval of a revolution, cannot be changed quickly.

4. Despite the flood of propaganda, the likelihood that at least some elements of this propaganda were accepted, cannot be excluded. I presume that the paternalistic style to communications influenced the people's thought- and behavioural patterns towards the State (Meyer:1989).

5. One must distinguish between the short-term effect induced by the end of M-L. and between freeing the language of its semantic legacy. Several terms, especially ideological concepts carrying several connotations, have been contaminated for a long time to come and it will take a long time before terms such as "Socialism" or "collective" are cleansed from the semantic legacy of this era.

3. Before and After

I would like to illustrate some of the aspects of change in the language of the GDR by taking examples from textbooks used in "Staatsbürgerkunde" (citizenship studies). The curriculum itself was formulated using highly emotive rhetoric to enforce adverse images: "Lessons should contribute to intensifying a disgust for and hatred of imperialism among the pupils."

"The object of the lesson should be to make the pupil's intransigent opinion towards imperialism and in particular towards West German imperialism even more pronounced" (Lehrplan Staatsbürgerkunde. p 42, 33).
The pupils are told explicitly about the manipulative use of language. Corresponding to the M-L doctrine, it is only imperialism which, by force of definition, by adopting the strategy of occupying words semantically or by employing euphemisms, abuses the language.
"All the ideological-political acts of imperialism are permeated with anti-communist and anti-Russian sentiments and with misconceptions. Imperialism refuses to call its system by its rightful name. Instead it refers to itself as "the free world", a "democracy" and "Atlantic partnership". Consequently, the capacity of millions of people to think and judge has been ruined" (Staatsbürgerkunde = SBK, Klasse9; p66). In a different passage (p109), this manipulation is referred to as "psychological warfare", carried out by monopolistic capitalism against the working population. According to their definition, manipulation is the exclusive domain of the other side: It can never be anything else but,

bourgeiosie's method of exercising ideological power". This passage serves to illustrate both the use of military metaphors and also semantic operative techniques to divide up political terminology. Terms loaded with positive connotations are used to describe their own system, whereas negatively charged terms serve to discredit the opposing system. (Bergsdorf:1983).

Special semantic treatment of terms which are indispensable because of their positive connotations, or terms which have lost their negative connotations and so can be used again, is exemplified in the words democracy and dictatorship.

"We are well aware of attempts to gloss over the essential nature of the bourgeoise state, by using all manner of etiquettes - including democracy ..... To compare the terms, "dictatorship" and "democracy", without prior explanation serves to obscure the class - structure inherent in both. In actual fact, it is not dictatorship and democracy which is being compared, but a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, that is, bourgeoise democracy on the one hand and a dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, proletarian democracy on the other hand"(SBK, Abitursklasse: p403). It is essential that one is fully aware of the class-structure of democracy and subsequently the nature and objectives of state power, if one is to discern the construction of lies incorporated in imperialstic propaganda. This is the only means of recognising the class-structure of the so-called free democratic state system in capitalism"(SBK, Klasse 10: p144).

Another passage reveals how one of the most stigmatized words in M-L, namely capitalism, is filled with negative connotations by embedding it in metaphors. (Burkhardt:1988)
It is also an example of how, by repetition and using adjectives for support, one can use suggestion to effect:
"When referring to capitalism as decaying and parasitic, what is meant is that its decay and parasitic nature are features of a social system, whose chapter in history has come to an end. A society which has proven itself incapable of clearing the way for the rapid growth in productive forces and wealth in the interest of society as a whole, proves that it has outlived its historic significance" (SBK, Klasse 9; p78).

A number of these former texts are now particularly fascinating, since they would offer a wealth of information, if one were to exchange the key-word "capitalism" for the key-word "state socialism".
The end of M-L also means the end of its "Staatsbürgerkunde" (citizenship studies) and its textbooks. To document its end, the new subject aimed at educating pupils into becoming democratic citizens, has also been provided with a new title, "civics".

Nowadays "a radical break with what was formerly "Staatsbürgerkunde" is to be encouraged throughout"(Feige/Wilhelm:1990).The textbooks formerly used are now only valuable as sources for analysing state socialism. At present a paper compiled by the Clara Zetkin College of Education is serving as a guide for the new subject and for new textbooks. It states: "Civics lessons should contribute to forming mature and responsible adults, guided by a humanistic education, democratic convictions and the ability and willingness to take an active part in the processes leading to the formation of a political will and the ability to make decisions in society. They should be taught to settle conflicts in a civilized manner ... to exert tolerance towards people with differing political convictions and religious opinions and affiliations ... and to take a critical stance in respect to political decisions" (Feige:1990,p2f).The change is indeed radical. The paper not only manifests the end of an old ideology with its adverse images, but also the problems facing a society feeling its way into a pluralistic democracy. The special emphasis placed on acquiring the skill of "settling conflicts in a civilized manner" and the attitude of tolerance clearly illustrate the problems involved in learning how to "put democracy into practice". No mention is given to the fact that these problems do not only apply to the pupils tackling the new subject of "civics" but pose problems for all former citizens of the GDR.

In addition to dispensing with adverse images as specified by the State, the friendly images and self-representations also decreed by the State (e.g. internationalism and absolute solidarity with the working classes of other countries) have vanished. The didactic aims and efforts involved in teaching civics should be dedicated to combating the hostility felt towards foreigners, which, since the change, has escalated: lessons should be aimed at overcoming "racism", "hatred towards foreigners" and "anti-semitism".

4. The new language as a disguise?

The change manifested in the contents of the paper on new civics teaching is undoubtedly radical. However, there is also a question which needs to be raised in a radical manner: is this text then - in some cases at least - not just verbal make-up, using new terms to form a mask? Does the change in ideology and language also correspond to a change in consciousness and attitude or is the change in language just a means of covering up the old mentality and perhaps even the old ideology? Adopting the language of democracy - a fact which cannot be overlooked - can also serve as a ticket into a new society. A new label does not always guarantee that the contents are new. Renaming sometimes took place far too quickly after the change in the GDR to allow for a corresponding change in conviction. This suspicion towards opportunists using a changed language to gain entrance in a new society has been crystallized by creating a new word from "Wende" (turn) to "Wendehälse" (turncoats).

As long as the past is not discussed clearly, the danger and fear of a new language being employed not only to express new ideas but to also help to disguise old ideas and views will continue to increase. The text does not evade the issue but its approach is fragmentary: it merely calls for "an analysis of stalinistic groupings - (and) ideologies and political stuctures that produce or encourage "uniformity", controlling the individual and the external regulation of individual decisions".

The language in the paper does not only represent a radical change towards M-L, but is already different to the language used after the "Wende". No mention is made of socialism throughout the text. During the German October revolution, the "Socialist dream" and the views of democratic socialism still had an integral part to play. Pupils should now only learn about Marxism as a "ideological stream of thought and movement". They should continue to be taught about the "common aspects and differences between Marxism and Christianity with regard to social development". The political climate, however, has changed drastically in only a few months, and the political euphoria of the revolution has now turned into a rush for "reunification" and utopia in the form of Deutschemarks. At this "turning point in time", the term socialism has finally been stigmatized to the extent that it can be employed sucessfully as a semantic club in the fight for words and electoral votes.

As far as the economy is concerned, the change has produced even more radical effects. Capitalism as a term, however, does not appear in the text at all. We have instead a new "magic word": social market economy. "The social market economy as an economic political concept to form a link between free enterprise based on performance and measures undertaken by the government to regulate the economy and thus ensure social balance and progress"(p8). The question must once again be raised as to the degree to which this assimilation of language use corresponds to an assimilation of attitudes. Does conforming to a language express a conformity in consciousness or is this not just also a means of hiding ideological continuity and non-assimilation? Different

motives out of different interests can lie behind the use of a homogenised and assimilated language: while there are those who will exploit it to gain entrance into a new form of society, others will employ it as a political instrument for retaining control and directing the stream of consciousness.

However, even if the rapid change in language corresponded with a rapid change in mentality, the question is whether we are not just witnessing, in this particular case, a straightforward exchange of stereotypes and prejudices. The hostile image afforded to capitalism is replaced by the non-hostile image of a market economy. A negative prejudice is merely exchanged for a positive one rather than being substituted as the result of rational thinking and sound judgement.

5. Prospects

In the near future, we will be confronted with two major problems in our field of work. Firstly, will it be possible for former citizens and experts of the GDR to be allowed to develop their own textbooks, offering the opportunity for an open discussion about the past and the present? Secondly, to what extent will the process of German reunification act as a suction pipe, producing homogenity which will have repercussions on the West German political culture and language? This could unleash a form of semantic crusade against any terms belonging to the semantic word field including "Socialism". Criticism has recently been voiced against treatment of the GDR in West German textbooks (DER SPIEGEL: 21/1990), providing us with a first insight into future tendencies.

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